


Disarmament

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The prospect of a non-proliferation policy, in particular through the conclusion of disarmament treaties, took shape at the beginning of the 1960s. A variety of factors contributed to this trend: the growing popularity of anti-nuclear groups, the potential acquisition of atomic weapons by other countries (India, Israel, Sweden and Australia) or the risk that they would be developed by Germany; the beginnings of détente between the two superpowers after the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 and the realisation of the danger of proliferation by the United States and the Soviet Union.^[1]

While the nuclear ‘de-escalation’ which followed the 1962 crisis was conducive to the signing of a first partial nuclear test ban treaty by the United Kingdom, the United States and the Soviet Union on 5 August 1963, negotiations with a view to disarmament had started a long time before that, as soon as the Second World War was over. Differences of opinion and diplomatic rivalries, as well as resistance to monitoring, were to prevent the conclusion of general agreements, to the advantage of more restricted agreements, despite support from the Europeans, who were keen to see the nuclear peril removed from the continent. The French, the Germans and the British were all worried about the effects of the period of détente and, in particular, of a ‘neutral zone’ possibly being created in central Europe.^[2] These concerns were still to the fore during their discussions in the WEU Council beyond the 1960s,^[3] and in the replies to the Assembly’s recommendations.^[4]

The defence of national interests was a pivotal argument in the difficulties which stood in the way of banning nuclear testing.^[5] France wanted to retain its right to test its future nuclear weapon. During the negotiations on the 1963 treaty,^[6] it maintained that halting nuclear tests for military purposes was not really a move towards disarmament and that it did not do away with the stockpiles of bombs and fissile materials.^[7] De Gaulle withdrew France from the disarmament negotiations and went ahead with the French deterrent programme. The first French bomb exploded on 13 February 1960. De Gaulle’s attitude was a break with the more conciliatory stance of his predecessors, who had allowed a degree of cooperation on nuclear matters with the British.^[8] Indeed, France’s relations with the United Kingdom or the United States always contained an element of distrust, regardless of which government was in office. Before it set up its own ‘strike force’, Paris was in favour of nuclear disarmament as means of preventing a widening gap between France and the United Kingdom. The French government would then suspect London of doing its best to postpone for as long as possible the date on which the actual manufacture of nuclear weapons would be halted when they argued for testing to be suspended.^[9] When France acquired the atomic bomb, by attacking the policy of disarmament and arms control France positioned itself as the defender of the interests of small states.^[10]

By contrast, as early as the 1950s the British government had shared nuclear power with the United States, which had brought Britain closer to the US. Against this background, the United Kingdom saw disarmament as a long-term objective which could be achieved if the political conditions were also in place; in other words, if a relaxation of tension in relations between the eastern and western blocs came about. The differences of opinion between London and Paris began to become more marked from the 1960s onwards, when France was developing its deterrent capacities. To soften the criticism, London put forward counter-proposals to those presented by France, thus practising a form of ‘*protective diplomacy*’.^[11]

However, neither France nor the United Kingdom disarmed unilaterally, despite pressure from a section of civil society (particularly in Britain).^[12] The French government’s view was that disarmament must include limits on the production of fissile material and nuclear arms, a reduction in the existing nuclear stockpiles and the elimination of long-range carrier systems.^[13] France refused to sign the nuclear non-proliferation treaty of 1 July 1968. In refusing, France was not, as the Foreign

Minister at the time, Michel Debré, explained, seeking the spread of nuclear weapons, but expressing its opposition to the NPT ‘philosophy’, seen as a symbol of the consolidation of the world into blocs and the hegemony of the two superpowers. Another charge levelled at the NPT was that it did not lay the foundations for real disarmament. In other words, it was a case ‘*of striking a balance rather than disarming, of security for the two great powers rather than security for all*’.^[14]

The United Kingdom, for its part, pursued a twofold policy on nuclear disarmament. It was hostile to any proposal which would threaten the credibility of its deterrent capacity, while at the same time seeking to extend accession to the NPT and step up the monitoring of exports of nuclear components usable for civilian and military purposes.^[15] This last objective particularly entailed the establishment of ‘voluntary’ groups such as the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), also known as the ‘London Group’. Britain thereby hoped to secure positive results at the conferences on reviewing the NPT (every five years). The first took place in 1975. The non-aligned countries decided on that occasion to support the NPT as the only treaty which required the nuclear powers to negotiate in terms of disarmament.^[16] In 1980, the British efforts proved to be in vain, in view of disagreements between the countries of the ‘North’ and those of the ‘South’ on the wording of a treaty completely banning nuclear tests and frictions in the western camp. The Carter administration tried to impose restrictions relating to nuclear energy on its European allies.^[17]

France’s ongoing refusal to sign the NPT and the wide gap between the French and British positions on the NPT were regularly emphasised by the British, particularly in the Council of WEU — especially as in the 1970s France was the only WEU Member State not to have signed up to it.^[18] Despite the pressure that could be put on it, France was not motivated to change its approach at the military strategy level as regarded the East–West balance in Europe. Georges Pompidou did not place ‘*détente above defence*’. His intention was to secure the West’s position vis-a-vis the East and reject any reduction in the numbers of American troops on European soil or in Western military capacity.^[19] The invasion of Czechoslovakia confirmed France in its view of the usefulness — or the pointlessness — of disarmament treaties.^[20] Paris therefore adopted a negative attitude towards mutual and balanced force reductions (MBFR) and the SALT (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks) negotiations, even if the official line was to encourage these negotiations as long as they only involved the Soviet Union and the United States.^[21] The SALT II agreements were signed by the United States and the Soviet Union on 18 June 1979. Both the British and the French welcomed the SALT II negotiations, although France refused to take part in any third round of negotiations which would include not only warheads but also launch facilities.^[22] The SALT II agreements did not enter into force. After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the United States refused to ratify them.

The issue of disarmament was also discussed in the Council of WEU, particularly when there were discussions of East–West policy.^[23] The Council was a focal point for information about the negotiations which took place in the United Nations General Assembly and the Security Council, at the Geneva Disarmament Conference^[24] and, from 1975 onwards, at the meetings between the countries which had signed the non-proliferation treaty.^[25] The WEU Council was also a forum for discussion and for concerting the positions of the Member States. The states would set out, in detail, their views on the negotiations and their national policies. The United Kingdom and France also took advantage of the Council’s meetings to express their support for a non-proliferation agreement which would not be to the detriment of Western security.^[26] The British and French differed, however, on the attitude to be adopted towards the Soviet Union. The British, in particular, considered that ‘*attempts by one nation in the West, imagining it could solve all its own problems vis-à-vis the Soviet Union without consultation with its neighbours*’ had failed and reiterated that NATO remained the appropriate framework, ‘*in the first instance at any rate*’, for preparing a ‘*European security conference*’.^[27] A conference of this kind, on security and cooperation in Europe, opened in Helsinki

on 3 July 1973 and continued subsequently in Geneva. The final act of the conference was adopted in the Finnish capital. It laid down ten principles which were to structure and support good relations and cooperation in Europe between the signatory states.^[28]

The consultations within the Council of WEU in fact encouraged the movement towards arms limitation by promoting close cooperation and concerted action, which were necessary if the preparatory work for the conference on European security was to succeed. In 1977, at the Council of Ministers' meeting in Strasbourg, France and the United Kingdom expressed the need to give effect to all the provisions of the Helsinki Final Act by keeping up the pressure on the eastern bloc countries. In 1979, however, in view of the rising tension, London and Paris declared at the Council of Ministers' meeting in Rome that they wished to maintain a convincing defence capacity for as long as necessary. As the Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Sir Ewen Fergusson, put it, *détente* could not be a one-way process, while the French State Secretary for European Affairs, Pierre Bernard-Reymond, said that *détente* had at the same time to be based on a balance of forces.^[29]

The members of the Assembly of WEU were very active on the question of nuclear disarmament. Nearly 40 reports and recommendations on the subject were adopted between 1963 and 1982.^[30] They repeatedly urged the members of WEU to sign and ratify the NPT^[31] and regularly put questions to the Council on French and British participation in the SALT talks.^[32] The subject matter of the Assembly's questions, however, often exceeded the areas of competence conferred on the Council by the Member States and the Brussels Treaty. Furthermore, the North Atlantic Council took precedence with respect to disarmament and arms control matters. However, as the French delegation stressed, the Atlantic Council had agreed that close consultation with the Allies was essential as regards the SALT talks and that '*[i]t is only through such consultations that the member states of WEU will be able to seek to ensure that the negotiations do not jeopardise either their security or their interests*'.^[33]

The Assembly's insistence on the need to give WEU an active part to play in the negotiations on nuclear arms limitation led it to ask the Council to consider establishing consultations between European powers to give the views of European states on the American–Soviet SALT II negotiations a wider hearing. In the light of the consultations which had already taken place in NATO and the risks of overlapping with the Advisory Group set up specially to organise consultations between the United States and other NATO members which were parties to the decision of 12 December 1979,^[34] the Council considered that there was no need to have recourse to other bodies.^[35]

[1] GAVIN, Francis J. Nuclear proliferation and non-proliferation. In: LEFFLER, Melwyn and WESTAD, Odd Arne (eds). *The Cambridge History of the Cold War (Volume II: Crises and détente)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, pp. 400–401.

[2] HEUSER, Beatrice. *NATO, Britain, France and the FRG. Nuclear Strategies and Forces for Europe, 1949–2000*. *Op. cit.* pp. 38–41.

[3] [French Ministry of Foreign Affairs.] Political Affairs Directorate. Pacts and Disarmament Service. *Note. Re Conseil de l'UEO. Point II de l'ordre du jour (désarmement): 15 octobre 1968*. 5 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 17. Serial mark EU.40.1.3. Rome (October 1968). 1960–1969; Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 423rd meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 1st July 1971 in London*. CR(71)14. 2 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Foundation and expansion of WEU. Year: 1971, 01/09/1970-30/11/1972. File 131.4. Volume 1/1.

[4] Council of Western European Union. *Amendments proposed by the French delegation to the draft reply to Recommendation 238*. London: 19.09.1973. Copy No 33. 6 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux).

<http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1973, 01/06/1973–30/11/1973. File 202.413.20. Volume 1/1; Council of Western European Union. *Amendments proposed by the British delegation to the draft reply to Recommendation 238*. London: 20.09.1973. Copy No 33. 6 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1973, 01/06/1973–30/11/1973. File 202.413.20. Volume 1/1.

[5] For further information on the partial nuclear test ban treaty, see: FISCHER, Georges. L'interdiction partielle des essais nucléaires. In: *Annuaire français de droit international [online]*. Volume 9, 1963 [consulted on 23 February 2015], pp. 3–34. Available at: [/web/revues/home/prescript/article/afdi_0066-3085_1963_num_9_1_1022](http://web.revues/home/prescript/article/afdi_0066-3085_1963_num_9_1_1022). doi: 10.3406/afdi.1963.1022

[6] China and France had agreed to abide by its provisions since 1980.

[7] Note from the Political Affairs Directorate. French position on disarmament: Paris, 21 March 1963. In: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Committee for the Publication of French diplomatic documents. *Documents diplomatiques français: 1963*, Volume I, 1 January–30 June. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 2000. Document No 106. pp. 295–297.

[8] *Opening statement by Selwyn Lloyd on disarmament at the WEU Council (London, 26 February 1957)*. The National Archives of the UK (TNA). Foreign Office, Political Departments: General Correspondence from 1906–1966. WESTERN ORGANISATIONS (WU): Western European Union–WEU (WUW). WEU ministerial meetings. 01/01/1957–31/12/1957, FO 371/131147 (Former Reference Dep: File 1078 (pp. 24 to end)).

[9] Note from the Ambassador of France in London. Remarks on the British stance on disarmament: London, end of July 1957. In: French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Committee for the Publication of French diplomatic documents. *Documents diplomatiques français: 1957*, Volume II, 1 July–31 December. Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1991. Document No 82. pp. 169–171.

[10] KOŁODZIEJ, Edward A. *French international policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou. The politics of grandeur*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 132.

[11] MARRET, Jean-Luc. *La France et le désarmement*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 1998. pp. 22, 26–29. ISBN 2 738461530

[12] SIMPSON, John. *Deterrence, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and UK Trident. Options for the United Kingdom's Nuclear Weapons Programme*. Discussion paper 4 of the BASIC Trident Commission, p. 17.

[13] KOŁODZIEJ, Edward A. *French international policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou. The politics of grandeur*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974, p. 133.

[14] French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Council of Ministers of WEU. Item II of the agenda (disarmament): Speaking points*. 5 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 17. Serial mark EU.40.1.3. Rome (October 1968). 1960–1969.

[15] SIMPSON, John. *Deterrence, Disarmament, Non-Proliferation and UK Trident. Options for the United Kingdom's Nuclear Weapons Programme*. Op. cit. p. 19.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Council of Western European Union. *Draft reply to Recommendation 264*. 11.11.1975. 1 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1969, 01/12/1969–16/10/1985. File 202.413.999.06. Volume 1/1; Council of Western European Union. *Secretariat-General note. Recommendation 264 on the proliferation of nuclear weapons*. London: 18.11.1975. WPM(75)2. 3 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1969, 01/12/1969–16/10/1985. File 202.413.999.06. Volume 1/1; Council of Western European Union. *Draft reply to Recommendation 264*. 21.11.1975. 2 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1969, 01/12/1969–16/10/1985. File 202.413.999.06. Volume 1/1. France and China did not sign the treaty until 1992.

[19] KOŁODZIEJ, Edward A. *French international policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou. The politics of grandeur*. Op. cit. pp. 149–150.

[20] French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *Council of Ministers of WEU. Item II (1)(b) of the agenda: Speaking points*. 5 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 17. Serial mark EU.40.1.3. Rome (October 1968). 1960–1969.

[21] KOŁODZIEJ, Edward A. *French international policy under de Gaulle and Pompidou. The politics of grandeur*. Op. cit. pp. 150–151.

[22] Agency for the Control of Armaments. Division II. *Tactical nuclear force*. 24.01.1979. REH/cr. 2 p. Op. cit.

For further details of the negotiations, see: GALLOIS, Pierre. Les SALT, inutiles et dangereuses négociations. In: *Politique étrangère [online]*, No 1, 1979, 44th year [consulted on 20 February 2015], pp. 51–71. Available at:

[/web/revues/home/prescript/article/polit_0032-342x_1979_num_44_1_1589](http://web.revues/home/prescript/article/polit_0032-342x_1979_num_44_1_1589). DOI: 10.3406/polit.1979.1589.

[23] Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 234th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in The Hague on 25th and 26th October 1963*. II. Political consultation. CR(63)20. Part I. pp. 8–10; 12–14. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1963, 01/10/1963-30/11/1965. File 132.15. Volume 1/7; Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 524th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 26th April 1977 at Strasbourg*. II. East–West Relations. CR(77)7. pp. 13–18; 22–25. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15. Volume 5/7; Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 548th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 16th May 1979 in Rome*. II. Bilateral East–West relations. CR(79)5, pp. 11–19. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15. Volume 5/7.

[24] The Disarmament Conference, which was established by resolution of the Extraordinary General Assembly of the UN in 1978, was a forum that was separate from the UN and its bodies. Its task was to act as a single forum for negotiations on disarmament.

[25] Though they were organised by the UN, these meetings were independent of the UN.

[26] Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 243rd meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level in London on 23rd and 24th January*. II. Political consultations. CR(64)3. Part I. pp. 14–17; 19. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1963, 01/10/1963-30/11/1965. File 132.15. Volume 1/7.

[27] Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 386th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 9th and 10th January 1970 in Brussels*. II. Political consultation. CR(70)1. Part I. esp. p.16. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Foundation and Expansion of WEU. Year: 1966, 01/03/1966-30/11/1970. File 132.15. Volume 2/7.

[28] For a presentation, see: Ghébali, Victor-Yves. L'Acte final de la Conférence sur la sécurité et la coopération en Europe et les Nations Unies. In: *Annuaire français de droit international*, Volume 21, 1975. pp. 73–127.

[29] Council of Western European Union. *Extract from minutes of 548th meeting of WEU Council held at ministerial level on 16th May 1979 in Rome*. II. Bilateral East–West relations. CR(79)5, pp. 11–19. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1975, 01/02/1975-30/12/1982. File 132.15. Volume 5/7.

[30] Assembly of Western European Union. Recommendation 97 on the state of European security. Disarmament and the nuclear force (Paris, 11th sitting, 4 December 1963). In: *Proceedings: Ninth Ordinary Session, Second Part, Volume IV: Minutes: Official Report of Debates*. Paris: Assembly of WEU, December 1963, p. 30; Assembly of Western European Union. Recommendation 189 on the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Paris, eighth sitting, 9 December 1969). In: *Proceedings: Fifteenth Ordinary Session, Second Part, Volume IV: Minutes: Official Report of Debates*. Paris: Assembly of WEU, December 1969, p. 26; Assembly of Western European Union. Recommendation 216 on the political implications of the conference on European security (Brussels, twelfth sitting, 1 December 1971). In: *Proceedings: Seventeenth Ordinary Session, Second Part, Volume IV: Minutes: Official Report of Debates*. Paris: Assembly of WEU. December 1971, p. 44; Assembly of Western European Union. Recommendation 382 on disarmament (Paris, third sitting, 15 June 1982). In: *Proceedings: Twenty-eighth Ordinary Session, First Part, Volume II: Minutes: Official Report of Debates*. Paris: Assembly of WEU, June 1982, pp. 34–35.

[31] Assembly of Western European Union. Recommendation 189 on the treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (Paris, eighth sitting, 9 December 1969). In: *Proceedings: Op. cit.*

[32] Council of Western European Union. *Secretary-General's note. Joint meeting of the Council and the Assembly Committee on Defence Questions and Armaments. Luxembourg, 3 November 1970*. London: 13.11.1970. JM/62. Copy No 7. 2 p. French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Diplomatic Archives Centre in Nantes. Archives repatriated from the Embassy of France in London. 'Western European Union (WEU)' Series. 1953–1992 (2002). 378PO/UEO/1-389. Number 43. Serial mark UEO.1.5.CR. NATO/WEU relations. 1970–1974.

[33] Council of Western European Union. *Secretary-General's note. Assembly Recommendation 238*. London: 07.11.1973. C(73)149. 5 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>. Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1973, 01/06/1973-30/11/1973. File 202.413.20. Volume 1/1.

[34] Modernisation of longer-range INFs and reduction of such weapons.

[35] Council of Western European Union. *Secretary-General's note. Written question 230 put to the Council by a member of the Assembly*. London: 27.10.1982. C(82)111. 2 p. National Archives of Luxembourg (ANLux). <http://www.anlux.lu>.

Western European Union Archives. Secretariat-General/Council's Archives. 1954–1987. Organs of the Western European Union. Year: 1982, 01/01/1982-30/10/1982. File 202.413.29. Volume 1/1.